



Hennepin County's Gender-Specific Programs

*2017 Evaluation of Programs Designed to Meet the Needs of
System-involved Youth and Young Adult Females*

M A R C H 2 0 1 8

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Background

Youth and young adult females’ pathways to the juvenile justice and human service systems are often different from those of their male counterparts. Studies have indicated that system-involved youth and young adult females are much more likely than males to have histories of sexual abuse and other traumatic experiences, reported thoughts of suicide, experienced persistent sadness or mental illness, used drugs and alcohol, or run away from home (Zahn et al, 2009). In addition to the likelihood of physical and sexual abuse, risk factors associated with system-involvement include homelessness, family stress, negative peers and associates, school difficulties, and community instability (Amicus Girls Study, 2010; Holsinger et al, 2005).

Over the past three years, Wilder has evaluated Hennepin County’s gender-specific programs to assess the impact of some of the programs available to system-involved youth and young adults (program participants are over 17 years old). Funding from the Local Collaborative Time Study (LCTS) have supported these evaluations. Staff from Hennepin County’s Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCCR) and Health and Human Services Department (HHS) have worked in partnership with Wilder Research as they collected and analyzed program data.

Due to the emerging evaluation questions each year, not every program was involved in the evaluation each year. Therefore, while findings from previous years’ evaluations¹ may be referenced in this report, it is important to note that not all of the details are included in this report. (Figure 1).

1. Program participation in the evaluation by year

Program	2015	2016	2017
Brief Intervention	✓	✗	✗
Multisystemic Therapy (MST)	✓	✗	✗
Hold Your Horses	✓	✓	✓
Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T	✓	✓	✓
POWER	✗	✓	✓
Runaway Intervention Program	✓	✓	✗

¹ The 2015 report can be found here: <http://www.hccmhc.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/DOCCR-Programs-2015.pdf> and the 2016 report can be found here: http://www.hccmhc.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/DOCCR_HSPHD_GenderSpecific_2-17.pdf.

This report highlights the results of the 2017 evaluation, which focused on evaluating the system of gender-specific programs in Hennepin County through collecting information about participants' outcomes (e.g., feelings of safety, coping skills, well-being, and relationship building). It also provides information about the data collected in previous years, to provide context about some of the overarching lessons learned.

The programs included in the 2017 evaluation are Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold Your Horses, and POWER. All three programs work with female youth and young adults who are on probation. In addition, two of these programs (Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T and Hold Your Horses) also work with female youth and young adults who are working with a county social worker because they were sexually exploited or otherwise harmed or neglected by the people responsible for their care.

- **Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T.:** The YMCA runs Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., a gender-responsive curriculum for Hennepin County-involved adolescent youth and young adult females. The 12-week curriculum provides a psycho-educational support group with a focus on trauma designed to educate, heal, empower and transform the lives of girls. The specific curriculum and program was designed to create a safe environment for girls ages 13-18, from diverse backgrounds, in order to educate participants about sexual abuse and violence.
- **Hold Your Horses:** Cairns Psychological Services provides gender-responsive equine-assisted group psychotherapy. This equine therapy treatment model focuses on improving adaptive functioning skills for youth and young adult females who have experienced or are at high risk of experiencing sexual exploitation, abuse, or trauma. Hold Your Horses helps participants develop these skills by focusing on mindfulness, self-regulation, self-soothing, and self-awareness. The group takes place for two hours, one time per week, for 10 consecutive weeks. In addition to the group, participants may participate in two individual pre-group sessions and up to four individual post-group sessions.
- **POWER:** The Link operates POWER (Positive Opportunities for Women of Every Race), which is a gender-specific, trauma-informed program for probation-involved youth and young adult females ages 12-19. The POWER Program offers a combination of individualized case management and structured group programming to girls throughout Hennepin County. The program's goals are to prevent further justice involvement and to create an environment where young women can build relationships with one another; seek and give support; and discuss relevant topics around restorative justice, family and community connections, education and economic self-sufficiency, and health and wellness. The POWER Program is co-designed and overseen by a

Youth Advisory Committee, called the VOICE (Vision of Intelligence Creating Equity) Committee.

Each program provided details about the demographics of the youth and young adults they served in 2017. The youth and young adults served were mostly 12-17 years old (94%). Most identified as Black or of African ancestry (60%) or non-Latino/Hispanic (95%) (Figure 2). Note: not all individuals represented in the chart below completed the program, nor did they all participate in the evaluation.

2. Youth and young adults served in 2017 (N=110)

Age	Percent
12-17 years old	94%
18 years or older	a
Unknown/missing	a
Race	
Asian/Southeast Asian	a
Biracial/Multiracial	17%
Black/African ancestry	60%
Native American	a
White/Caucasian	14%
Other	a
Ethnicity	
Latino/Hispanic	a
Non-Latino/Hispanic	95%

^a For any category with less than 10 respondents, the data were suppressed for confidentiality purposes.

Key takeaways

Throughout the three-year evaluation, researchers talked with youth and young adult participants in gender-specific programs, as well as with program staff and county referral staff. The following three points merit special consideration as key takeaways.

The gender-specific programs offered in Hennepin County are flexible and have diverse strengths.

Combining the perspectives of participants, program staff, and referral staff leads to the conclusion that the gender-specific program system is flexible and has diverse strengths. First, youth and young adults cite a number of aspects of the program that they found valuable or impactful. Additionally, program and referral staff consistently said that they appreciated the different service delivery models and foci of the gender-specific programs. Having multiple and different options for youth and young adults is a system strength.

The gender-specific programs offered in Hennepin County have a broad and positive impact on the youth and young adult they serve.

Program participants and staff agree that the gender-specific programs have a positive impact. Significantly, there are benefits for all stakeholders, from youth and young adults who participate in programming, to the program staff who have an opportunity to provide necessary and high-quality services, to the county that realizes the benefit of improved youth and young adults' well-being and community safety.

The benefits of the gender-specific programs offered in Hennepin County are comprehensive and enduring.

Participants and staff also agree that the benefits of the gender-specific system are holistic and long-term. Program participants mentioned improvements in a variety of areas, from coping skills to having a positive plan for the future. Program and referral staff agreed that the gender-specific programs have a variety of positive impacts for youth and young adults, helping them to make improvements over the course of their life.

Youth and young adult voice

Method overview

Gathering the youth and young adult voice

Throughout the three-year evaluation, researchers captured the perspective of youth and young adults in two ways: through interviews and in a survey given to participants after they have completed the program (Figure 3).

3. Youth and young adults participating in the evaluation by year (N=75-76)

Year	Youth and young adults interviewed	Youth and young adults surveyed
2015	23	24
2016	25	23
2017	27	29
Total	75	76

Researchers interviewed youth and young adults about their experiences in gender-specific programs. Interviews were done in person or over the phone, and included both open-ended and close-ended questions. Youth and young adults who participated in programming and in the evaluation of the gender-specific system were referred by either the Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCCR) or the Hennepin County Health and Human Services Department (HHS). Confidentiality agreements mean that responses cannot be separated according to referral source, but it is often the case that youth and young adults are involved with both systems.

Additionally, in all three years of the evaluation, youth and young adults were asked to complete a survey to capture information about their feelings around safety, communication, home life, relationships, self-esteem, well-being and resilience.

Reporting the youth and young adult voice

In interviews, youth and young adults had some consistent things to say about the gender-specific programs, and we report viewpoints that were raised by two or more youth and young adults. Where themes are consistent across both interviews and surveys, we report the interview theme immediately followed by relevant survey data. Charts of survey data

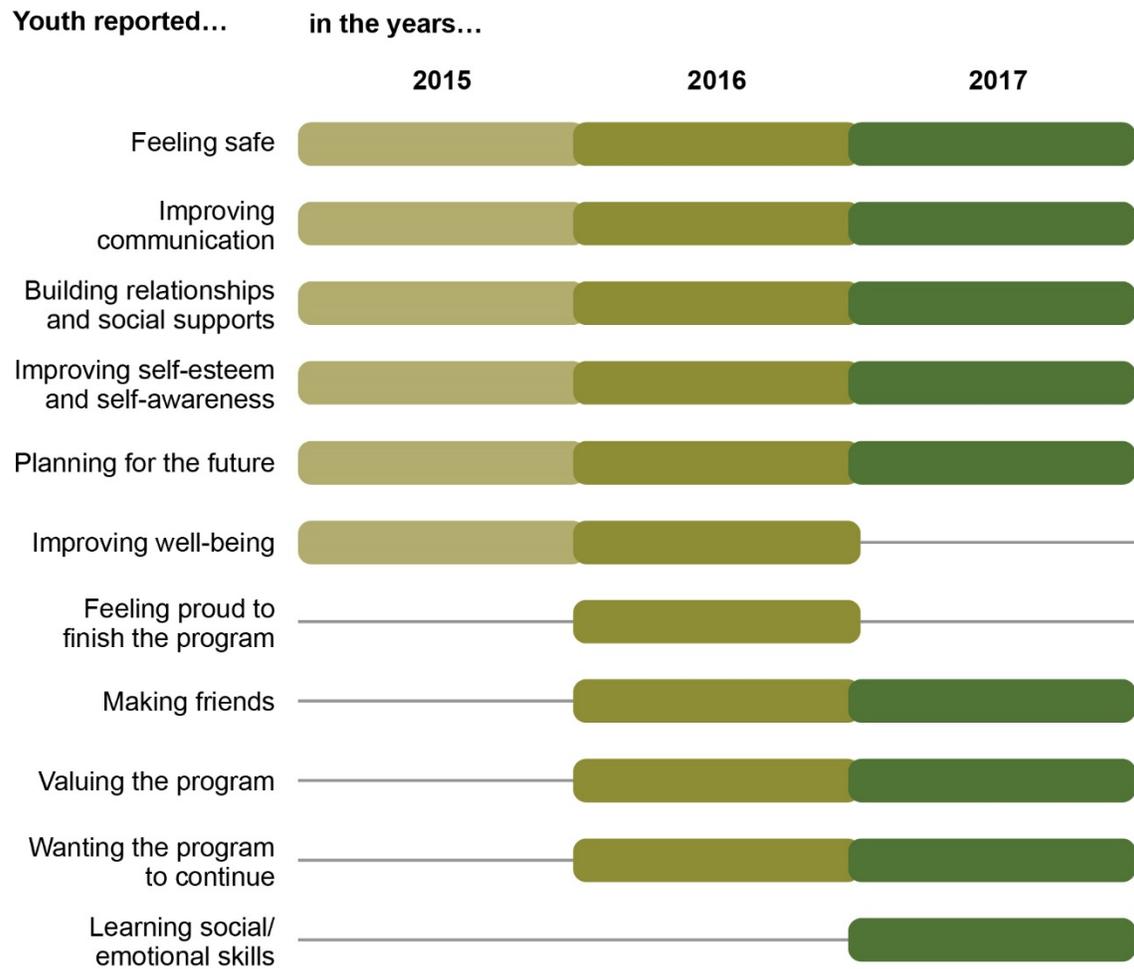
include data collected in all years.² Given the small number of respondents, findings should be interpreted with caution and are not intended for comparison of the various programs participating in the evaluation.

Researchers also interviewed some youth and young adults with unique stories to tell. These stories are presented in a sidebar shared later this section.

Themes from the youth and young adults' interviews

In interviews, a number of themes emerged over the three-year evaluation period, as highlighted in Figure 4.

4. Interview themes over time



² Please note that in 2015, four participated in the Hold Your Horses program more than once. Therefore, there may be duplicate responses in the results, as surveys were conducted with all participants at the end of program participation.

Themes raised in both interviews and in survey findings

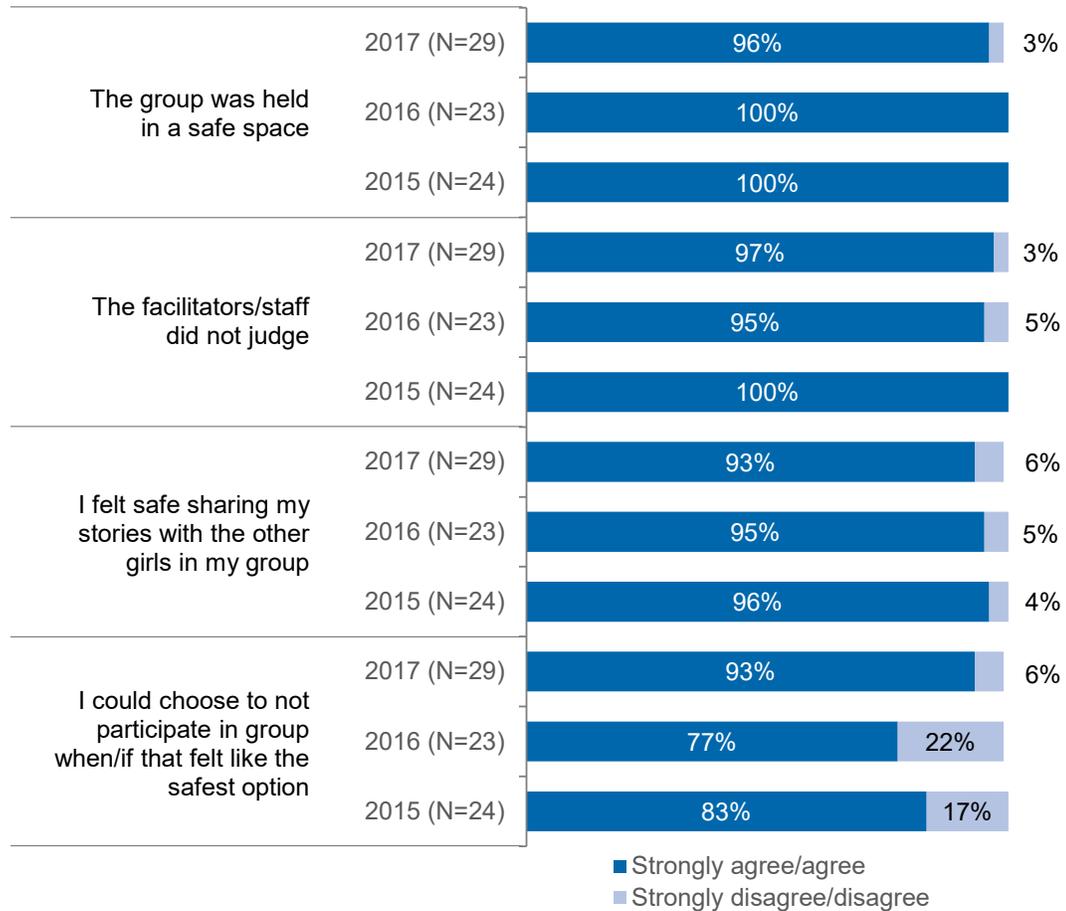
Many themes emerged in both the interviews and surveys and were consistent across two or more years of the evaluation. These themes included:

Feeling Safe. In every year of the interviews, youth and young adults consistently described feeling safe and comfortable in the program spaces.

I feel like it's an open environment, they're respectful of everybody and their religion. It's 100% supportive.

Likewise, in all three years of the survey, youth and young adults reported feeling that the groups were held in a safe space. In 2017, almost all of youth and young adults also felt that the facilitators or staff did not judge them (97%). Similarly, 93 percent of youth and young adults in 2017 felt safe sharing stories with others in the group and felt that they could choose not to participate in the group when or if that felt like the safest option (Figure 5).

5. Percentage of youth and young adults reporting feeling safe in programs



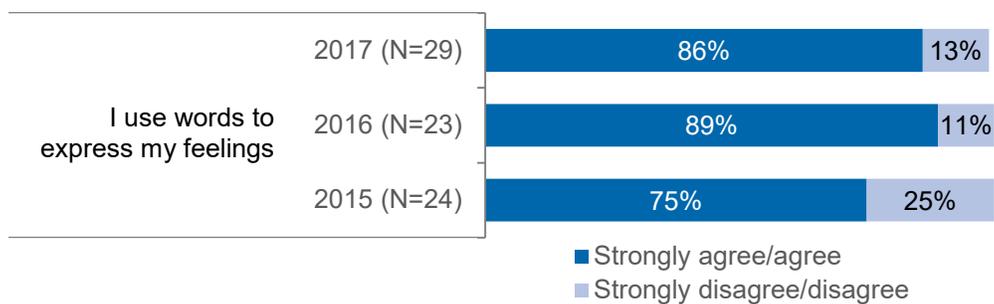
Note: Data may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Improving Communication. Every year, youth and young adults described an improved ability to identify and express feelings.

What have you learned? How to cope. How to tell people when they're in my boundary. I practiced that with my sister.

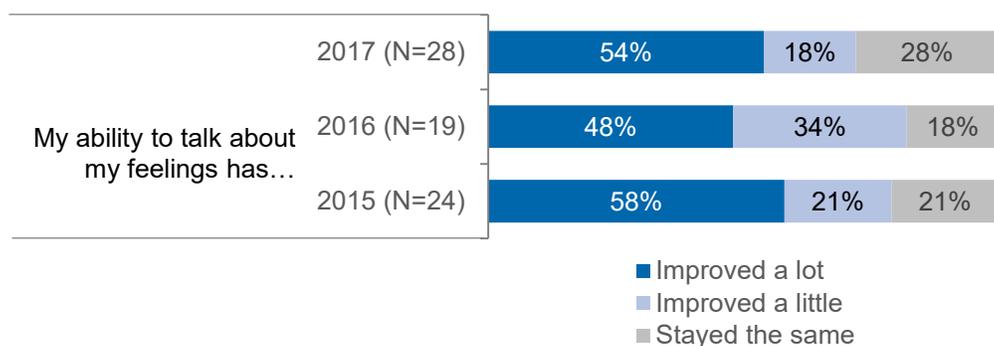
In all three years, most youth and young adults reported that they used words to express their feelings. Eighty-six percent of respondents in 2017 reported that they use words to express their feelings (Figure 6).

6. Percentage of youth and young adults reporting use of words to express feelings



Over the past three years, the majority of youth and young adults reported their ability to talk about their feelings improved. Seventy-two percent of respondents in 2017 reported that their ability to talk about their feelings has improved a little or a lot (Figure 7).

7. Percentage of youth and young adults reporting the ability to talk about feelings

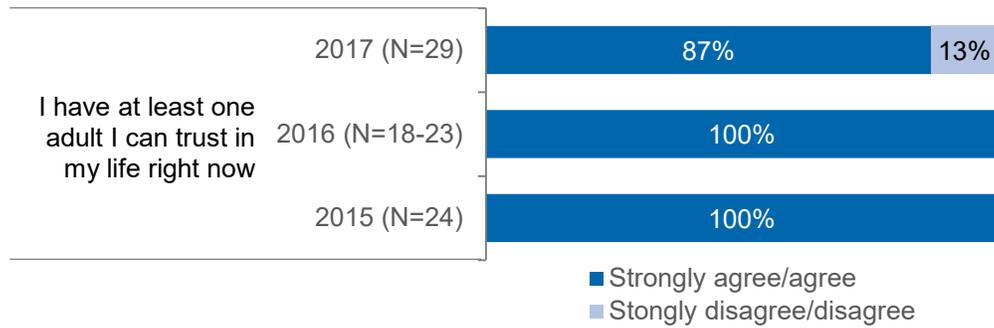


Building Relationships and Social Support. Throughout the three-year evaluation period, youth and young adults reported that the programs helped them build relationships and social supports.

I learned how to stay away from a lot of negative situations and that you don't have to hide all the bad things that are happening; you could tell people because someone is going to help you.

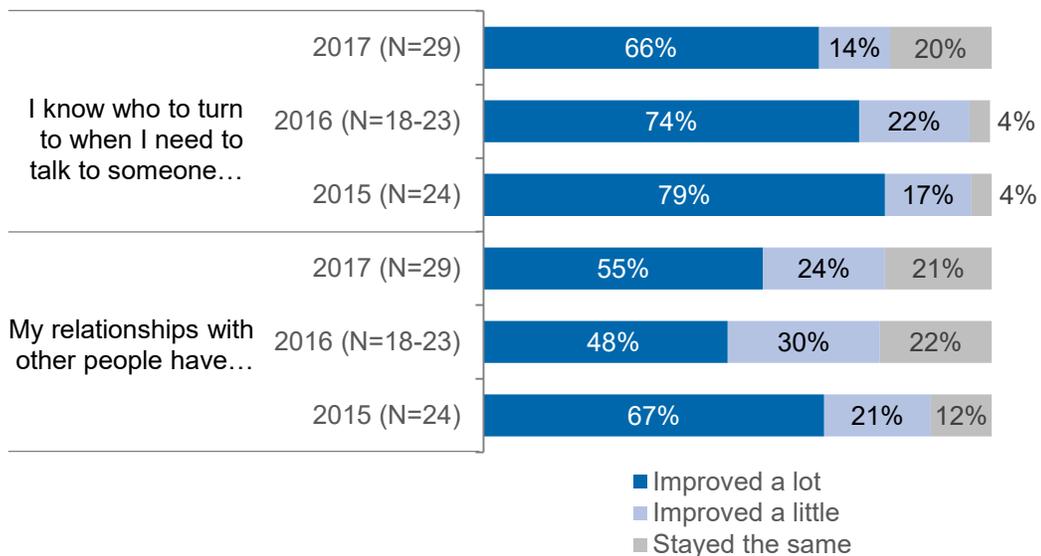
In all three years of the evaluation, a large majority of youth and young adults reported that they have at least one adult they can trust in their life. Specifically, in 2017, 87 percent “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with this item (Figure 8).

8. Percentage of youth and young adults reporting having a trusted adult in their life



In all three years of the evaluation, the majority of youth and young adults reported they knew who to talk to and that relationships improved with others. In 2017, 80 percent of youth and young adults reported that their knowledge of who to turn to when they need to talk to someone improved and 79 percent reported that their relationships with other people have improved (Figure 9).

9. Percentage of youth and young adults reporting knowing who to talk to and improved relationships with others

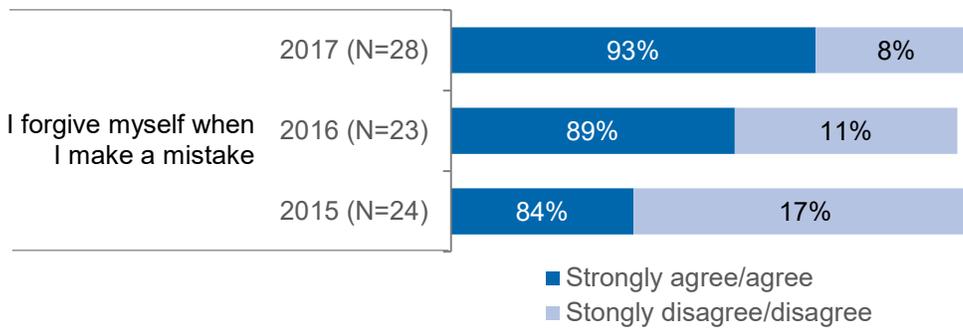


Improving Self-esteem and Self-awareness. Every year, youth and young adults said they improved their ability to better recognize their strengths, and to improve their self-awareness and self-esteem.

We learned a lot about esteem. A lot of girls have low self-esteem, so we learned about that and how to keep our confidence level up.

Almost all youth and young adults who completed the survey reported that they forgive themselves when they make a mistake. Specifically in 2017, 93 percent of the respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with this item (Figure 10).

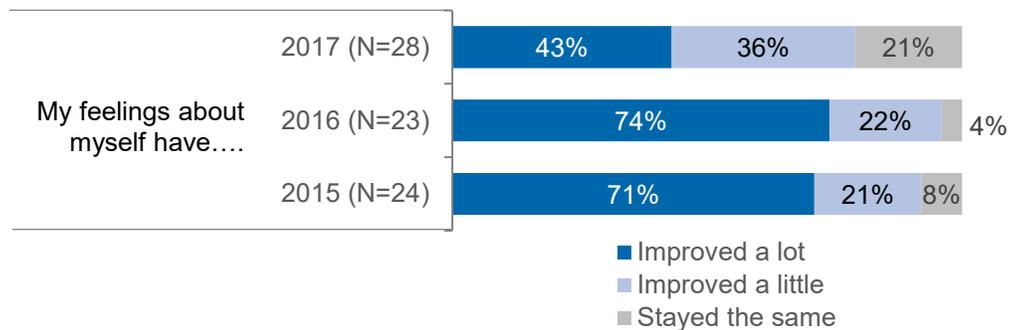
10. Percentage of youth and young adults reporting that they forgive themselves when they make a mistake



Note: Data may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Over the past three years, most survey respondents reported that their feelings about themselves had improved. In 2017, 79 percent reported improved feelings about themselves, which was notably different from in past years where at least 92 percent noted improvement with this item (Figure 11).

11. Percentage of youth and young adults reporting that their feelings about themselves improved



Planning for the Future. Throughout the three-year evaluation period, youth and young adults shared their hopes and dreams for the future during the interviews. They described how proud they were to overcome challenges and expressed excitement for future

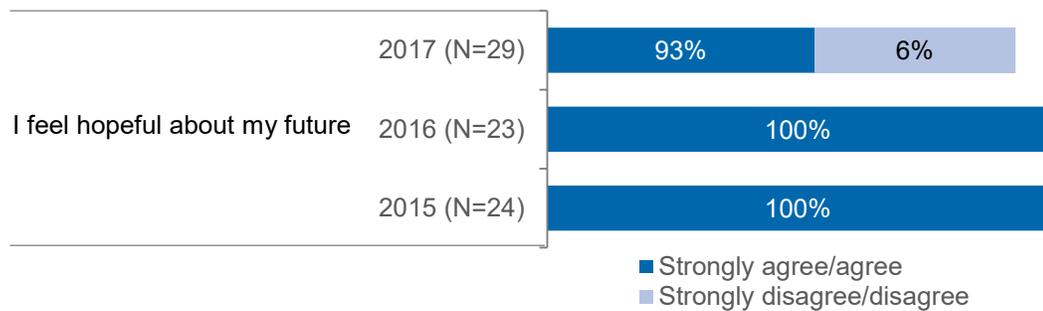
accomplishments, including continuing on the right track, graduating from high school, continuing to college, getting a job, and helping other youth and young adults who may have gone through similar difficulties.

What are you working on next? To become a better person and do things differently. Handling certain situations differently because we talk about “she did this and that, but what do you think you could’ve done?”

My plan is to start off two years at a community college and end at a university. I want to be a social worker.

Across all three years, almost all youth and young adults reported feeling hopeful about their future, including 93 percent in 2017 (Figure 12).

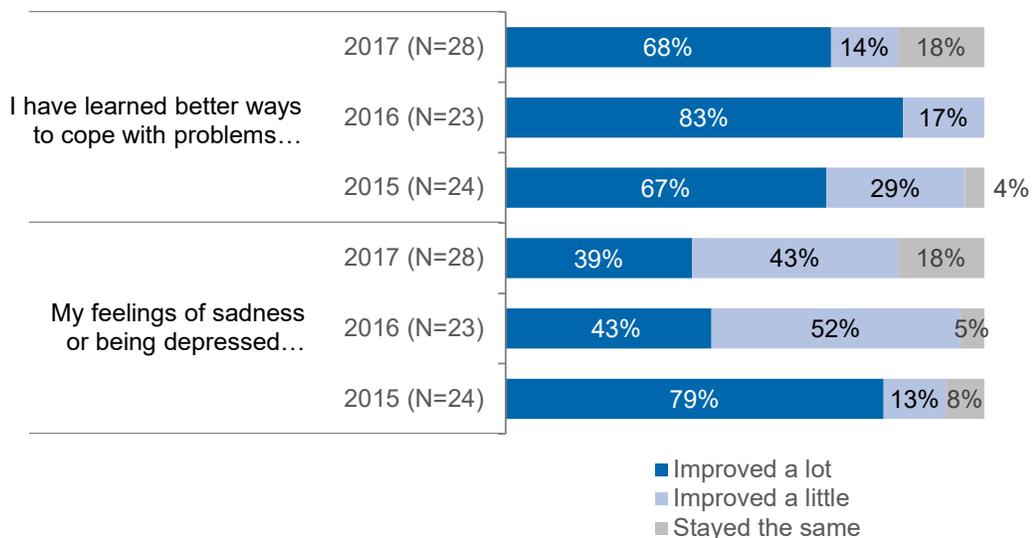
12. Percentage of youth and young adults reporting feeling hopeful about their future



Note: Data may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Coping and Depression. Most youth and young adults responding over the past three years reported that they have learned better ways to cope with problems and that their feelings of sadness or depression have improved (Figure 13).

13. Percentage of youth and young adults reporting improvement in their ability to cope and feelings of sadness or being depressed



VOICE: A YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR POWER

Researchers interviewed two youth and young adults who work on POWER's VOICE committee. POWER solely serves female-identified youth and young adults on probation. According to the youth and young adults, the VOICE committee serves two functions: to help adult staff better understand the youth and young adults they serve, and to enable youth to advise adult staff on program design and implementation. Youth and young adults are paid to participate in VOICE.

When asked what they liked about VOICE, both respondents said they valued helping people.

[We] use our experience to help other youth and young adults have a different outcome.

When asked what they wanted Hennepin County professionals to know about working with female-identified youth and young adults on probation, both had powerful insights.

One brought up capacity concerns, shared by referral sources and program staff (below).

[We] 're not really big, so there are probably a lot of other girls who are struggling who don't get referred.

Both also wanted referral staff to listen to the youth and young adults they serve.

If you listen to them and relate with them, you're more likely to get a positive response and a more willing response.

Participant interview themes

Due to the open-ended nature of the interviews, youth and young adults were free to raise themes in conversations with researchers that went beyond the questions on the survey. Many interview themes were consistent across evaluation years.

Making friends. In both 2016 and 2017, youth and young adults said that one positive impact of gender-specific programs was making friends or developing social connections with others in the groups.

It's a place I go to vent with girls I never met before. We're all comfortable. When my week is bad, that's when I like coming here.

I like the girls. One of them I know. You get to meet new people I'll be friends with after I leave.

Valuing the program. In both 2016 and 2017, youth and young adults expressed appreciation for programs, especially as a way to talk through problems and learn new things.

There's never been a day when I've come and thought it was boring. I feel like all the subjects we talked about were cool.

I express my emotions differently here, so I'm not mad. I calm down and talk about it.

Wanting the program to continue. Perhaps related to their appreciation of the programs, some youth and young adults in both 2016 and 2017 said that they are sad their participation in the program is ending. Others said they wished programs had a longer duration or that they could continue in programming past graduation.

I'm going to be sad when it ends. I'm going to miss it. I'm excited about taking all the stuff I learned and using it in the real world.

Feeling proud of finishing the program. In 2016, several youth and young adults expressed pride that they completed the program. This was not a theme from interviews in 2015 or 2017.

Learning social/emotional skills. When asked how being a part of a gender-specific program impacted their life and what, if any, strengths the program helped them recognize in themselves, youth and young adults in 2017 cited some social-emotional growth. They said that that programming helped them be calmer or nicer, helped with anger, or increased their ability to communicate and create better boundaries. The strengths that youth and young adults identified in themselves thanks to programming were coping skills, making boundaries, communicating, and being more aware or mindful.

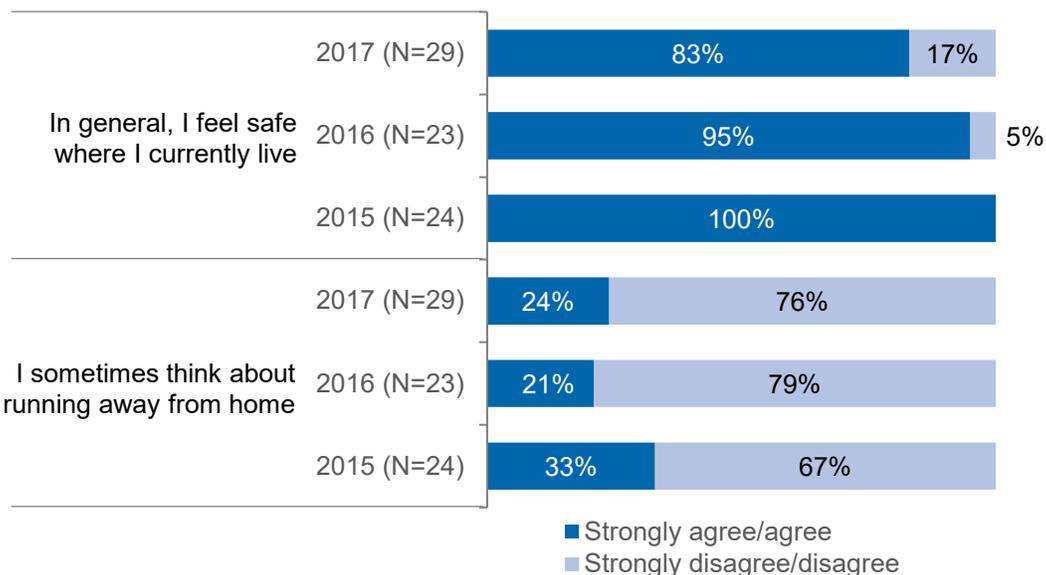
I learned coping skills, how it's okay to feel some type of way, physical signs of how people react differently and how horses are similar. I learned boundaries - number one thing - I wouldn't let some random person come up to me and touch me.

I'm using coping skills and doing better at focusing on now. I use mindfulness cards.

Themes that emerged from the survey

Situation at home. One theme emerged from the survey of youth and young adults in 2017. Most surveyed youth and young adults reported that they felt safe where they currently live (83%), and only about one in four said they had thought about running away from home (24%; Figure 14).

14. Percentage of youth and young adults reporting feelings of safety at home and thoughts of running away



How youth and young adults describe gender-specific programs

In interviews, researchers asked youth and young adults how they would describe the gender-specific program to a friend who had never heard of it before. Here are words they used:



Staff voice

A description of the youth and young adults served

In focus groups and interviews in 2016 and 2017, researchers asked program staff to describe the youth and young adults in their programs. Here are the words they used:



Overview of data collection methods for program and referral staff

Throughout the three-year evaluation, researchers spoke with program staff and staff from the county’s probation and human service departments who refer youth and young adults into gender-specific programs (Figure 15). (See “Appendix: Methods” for more.)

15. Staff participating in the evaluation by year

Year	Program staff	Referral staff
2015	9	N/A
2016	8	N/A
2017	4	8
Total	21	8

Researchers posed some of the same questions to program and referral staff, and some different questions. We report themes raised by two or more staff members and, where applicable, consolidate themes common to the two perspectives. Some themes raised in 2016 were supported by 2017 interviews; when the year is not noted, the theme only appeared in 2017.

Gender-specific programs have a variety of strengths

Referral staff named many strengths of the gender-specific programs.

- **Program staff.** Referral staff talked about the dedication of program staff, their ability to connect with participants, and their ability to meet participants where they are at as unique strengths of the gender-specific programs.
- **Trauma-informed approach.** Referral staff cited the trauma-informed approach of the gender-specific programs as a strength.
- **Variety of programs.** Referral staff also said that having multiple gender-specific programs with a variety of foci and strengths was a strength of the gender-specific system as a whole.
- **Communication and collaboration.** Both referral staff and program staff agreed that communication between probation and program staff was strong. Program staff additionally identified collaboration across gender-specific program staff as a system strength.

Gender-specific programs are impactful

Both referral source staff and program staff thought that gender-specific programs have positive impacts on participants. Positive impacts for youth and young adults include:

- **Overcoming shame and trauma.** Only referral staff raised this improvement, but many agreed that gender-specific programs help youth and young adults both identify and overcome feelings of shame and other negative impacts of trauma.
- **Increasing social/emotional skills.** Both program and referral staff cited improved social/emotional skills as a program impact. Those skills included improving coping skills, creating boundaries, being more self-reflective, and behaving more intentionally.
- **Improving their outlook for the future.** Both program and referral staff said that youth and young adults improve their plans for the future through participating in programming. Staff notice youth and young adults speaking more positively and hopefully about their education, career plans, and relationships.
- **Bonding with others in the program.** Through participating in programming, youth and young adults build positive relationships with peers. Program staff raised this theme in 2016 and both referral and program staff raised it in 2017. In addition, 2017

program staff said that youth and young adults develop trusting relationships with program staff.

- **Growing leadership skills.** In 2016, program staff shared that groups help youth and young adults grow into leadership roles. This was not a theme in 2017.

Lastly, in 2017, researchers asked referral staff whether one of the impacts of gender-specific programs is to make youth and young adults less likely to recidivate. Most agreed, while others were not sure. All referred back to the other impacts, above, as being equally or more important indicators of youth and young adults' growth and future safety and success.

Factors contributing to youth and young adults' success in programming

Researchers asked referral staff what, if anything, youth and young adults who were successful in programming had in common. The following two themes emerged:

- **Fully engaging in the program.** Youth and young adults who are successful engage with the gender-specific program and take advantage of the opportunity to make positive changes and connections while in a supportive environment.
- **Having a supportive adult in their life.** Referral staff said that youth and young adults who are successful in gender-specific programs often have at least one supportive and engaged adult in their life.

Youth and young adults face common challenges that hinder their success in programs

Both referral source staff and program staff raised significant and common challenges that negatively impact the success of youth and young adults in programs.

- **Unaddressed mental health needs.** Both program and referral staff said that youth and young adults who have unaddressed mental health needs are often not prepared to take advantage of gender-specific programs, and their success in programming suffers as a result.
- **Housing instability.** In both 2016 and 2017, program staff said that youth and young adults without stable housing struggle to regularly attend programming or complete assignments.

- **Inconsistent means of contact.** Again, in both 2016 and 2017, program staff said that youth and young adults without stable phone numbers, email access, or other methods of communication, struggle to consistently engage in programming.

The gender-specific system has a variety of areas for improvement

In 2017, both referral source staff and program staff identified ways to improve the gender-specific programming system. All of the themes from 2017 were distinct from challenges raised in past years. Suggestions for improvement were to:

- **Increase capacity.** As the gender-specific programs have a number of positive impacts, referral staff want to be able to refer more youth and young adults into programming, and to have more sessions of those programs operating on a closed cohort model. Some referral staff also would like gender-specific programs to serve youth and young adults of a larger age range.
- **Provide aftercare.** Both referral staff and program staff want programs to be able to provide aftercare. They hope that doing so will allow youth and young adults to gradually step up their independence, while still having some program support while accessing referrals and moving on with other goals.
- **Add programs to the system.** Distinct from adding capacity to the programs already providing gender-specific programming, both referral staff and program staff think adding programs to the gender-specific system would be a benefit for a number of reasons. First, youth and young adults are sometimes not referred to gender-specific programs because they may have a conflict with a youth or young adult already in programming. Adding more programs would decrease the frequency with which this challenge arises. Second, referral staff and program staff hope for programming that could address unmet youth and young adult needs, namely housing (in general, and for pregnant and parenting teens specifically), mental health issues, and additional educational supports. Finally, more programs in the system could add geographic and cultural diversity that program staff would like to see improved.
- **Improve transportation.** Both referral staff and program staff have challenges with consistently transporting youth and young adults to and from programming. They would like more options for transport and greater transport reliability.
- **Consistent communication.** Referral staff are challenged by a lack of regular communication with staff in some programs.

Why referral staff refer youth and young adults to gender-specific programming

In 2017, referral staff were asked what informed their decisions on whether to refer youth and young adults into gender-specific programs. The following themes emerged:

- **Aligning youth and young adults with programs.** Referral staff consistently said they would take a holistic view of youth and young adults' strengths, interests, risks, and needs, and attempt to align those attributes with openings in the gender-specific programs. Referral staff were pleased that programs have the flexibility to take youth and young adults outside of a cohort model, and that there is a diversity of strengths and foci across the gender-specific programs.
- **Courts sometimes exert influence.** Those referral staff working with youth and young adults on probation are sometimes obligated to refer them to one program or another due to the specificity of the court's orders. However, it is currently much more common for judges to order youth and young adults to gender-specific programming generally, which gives referral staff discretion to determine which specific program to refer to. All referral staff said that this is to the youth and young adults' benefit.

Recommendations

Keep key takeaways in mind

Whatever the structure of gender-specific programming in the future, those interviewed for this evaluation consistently highlighted the diversity of program models and strengths; the positive, holistic, and long-term impacts of the gender-specific programs on youth and young adults' well-being and future direction, and community safety. We recommend internalization of these takeaways when working with female-identified youth and young adults through Hennepin County systems in the future.

Address current challenges

We recommend addressing the current challenges of the gender-specific system. Both youth and young adults and staff stakeholders identified the following areas for improvement:

1. **Build on gender-specific programs.** First, we recommend maintenance and growth of the gender-specific program system. Youth and young adults, as well as staff stakeholders, consistently expressed a desire for greater program capacity, longer curriculum, aftercare, and other supports such as housing, mental health care, and chemical dependency services. Additionally, when asked what would happen if gender-specific programs were not available, program staff and referral staff all responded that this would be to the detriment of system-involved youth and young adults, and to community safety as a whole. Therefore, we recommend that Hennepin County continue to prioritize the maintenance and growth of gender-specific programming for system-involved youth and young adults.
2. **Capacity.** Increase program capacity so that all youth and young adults who would benefit from the programs can be enrolled in a timely fashion. Also, increase services offered so that youth and young adults are able to have mental health, chemical health, housing, medical, and childcare needs addressed through the gender-specific system.
3. **Aftercare.** Currently, it is common for youth and young adults who successfully complete programming to have no further connection to the program. Both youth and young adults and program staff think it would be beneficial for youth and young adults to be able to ease out of programming over a longer period, to allow for a gradual increase in community supports to meet any outstanding or long-term needs.

4. **Prevention.** At the time of evaluation, the gender-specific system served youth and young adults involved in the justice system or in out-of-home placements. Youth and young adults who are at risk but not involved in the county justice or child welfare systems should be able to participate in the gender-specific programs as well.

Maintain and strengthen stakeholder relationships

Relatedly, we recommend the continuation and strengthening of stakeholder relationships. Unsurprisingly in a systems evaluation, a common theme in program staff and referral staff interviews was how central the relationship between program and referral staff was to understanding and responding to participant success or challenges. Maintaining and strengthening these relationships will benefit the system as a whole.

Maintain evaluation practices

We recommend continuing evaluation of the gender-specific program system in order to tell the most complete story of the system and its impacts. First, the evaluation should incorporate the voices of diverse stakeholders in the system, from participants to program and referral staff. Second, it should take into account the capacity and communication preferences of the stakeholders, by meeting evaluation informants where it is most convenient, providing incentives, or providing both written and verbal opportunities to participate. Finally, researchers and evaluation stakeholders should be intentional about the evaluation questions and data collected. The system has a variety of impacts beyond recidivism and out-of-home placements, and evaluation participants should be given space to speak to those impacts that are most important to them.

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Appendix: Methods

Methods: Youth and young adults voice

Continuing the methods employed in previous reports, this evaluation incorporated a mixed-method approach that included both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis (interviews and a survey).

A1. Youth and young adults participating in the evaluation by year

Year	Youth and young adults interviewed	Youth and young adults surveyed
2015	23	24
2016	25	23
2017	27	29
Total	75	76

For this report, data collection occurred from January 2015 through December 2017, and included the following pieces:

- **In-person and phone interviews:** The purpose of the interviews was to gather information about participant experience and satisfaction with the program.
 - **2015:** A total of 23 interviews were completed with youth and young adults from Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T and Hold Your Horses.
 - **2016:** A total of 25 interviews were completed with youth and young adults from across the four programs: Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold your Horses, The Link’s POWER program, and the Runaway Intervention Program. Two interviews were completed with youth and young adults that did not complete their program.
 - **2017:** A total of 27 youth and young adults were interviewed from three programs: Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold Your Horses, The Link’s POWER program. Those interviews are incorporated into the “Youth and young adults’ voice” section, above. Researchers also interviewed two youth and young adults from The Link’s VOICE committee, a youth-led advisory committee for the POWER program. Those interviews are presented in a sidebar to the Youth and young adults’ voice section, above.

- **Surveys:** The purpose of the surveys was to gather information to better understand participants' experiences in the program and attributes of their emotional and mental health.
 - **2015:** 23 surveys were completed by youth and young adults from Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T. and Hold Your Horses.
 - **2016:** 23 surveys were completed with youth and young adults from Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold your Horses, and Link's POWER. Surveys were not completed with youth and young adults from the Runaway Intervention Program.
 - **2017:** 29 youth and young adults from three programs – Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T, Hold Your Horses, and The Link's POWER program – completed surveys. Those results are presented in the "Youth and young adults' voice" section, above.

Methods: Staff voice

Throughout the three-year evaluation, researchers interviewed program staff and referral source staff, and also conducted a focus group with program staff. For this report, data collection happened from January 2015 through December 2017. Activities were as follows:

- **2015:** Nine program staff were interviewed, from Humble Beginnings Brief Intervention program, Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T, Hold Your Horses, and the Runaway Intervention Program.
- **2016:** Eight program staff participated in a focus group, from Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T, Hold Your Horses, and The Link's POWER, and the Runaway Intervention Program.
- **2017:** Four program staff participated in interviews, from The Link's POWER program, Hold Your Horses, and the Runaway Intervention Program. Researchers also interviewed nine referral source staff. Five worked in Hennepin County Probation, including two supervisors. Two were gender-specific social workers with Health and Human Services Department (HHS), and two were in gender-specific social work in a community non-profit.

Appendix: Protocols

Participant interview

Participant survey

VOICE focus group

County staff interviews

Program staff interviews

Participant Interview

Hold Your Horses: interview questions

Introduction

My name is _____. You were invited to participate in this interview because you are taking part in Hold Your Horses (HYH). The reason we are doing these interviews is to find out more about the experience. Specifically, we would like to learn what you like and don't like about it and if you think Hold Your Horses has helped you.

Your interview will be confidential and I want to let you know that your name won't be identified or shared. Instead, we'll be reporting some of the common things we hear, so that it is more helpful to girls like you in the future. We will take the things we have learned from the interviews and report back to Hold Your Horses and Hennepin County so they can learn from your perspectives.

To make sure that we include accurate information in the report, I'd like to record our conversation, but only if you are comfortable with that. Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

Before we begin, I want you to know that everything you say during this interview will be kept confidential unless you tell us that you or someone else in your household is in immediate physical danger, for instance being a victim of abuse or neglect.

There may be questions that make you uncomfortable, so know that you do not need to answer them if you choose not to do so. Also, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I'll ask. Your individual comments will remain private, so I hope you will feel comfortable sharing your honest opinions as we talk today. At the end of this discussion, I'll give you a \$20 gift certificate to Target in appreciation of your time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Interviewer: Turn on recorder and state interviewee's first name].

Program-level questions

1. As I mentioned before, you were invited to this group because you are in the Hold Your Horses. How would you describe HYH to your friends or family? *I come here and work with horses to – coordinate self with horses and learn how to help me and the horses – how I can use them to direct my energy.*
2. Overall, what do you like about HYH? [PROBE: group, individual, journaling? What activities in group did you really like? What one thing did you like most about HYH?] *Working with the horses. Window of tolerance – in the middle of your brain is where you're most tolerant – you think better when you're in the middle – take deep breaths, smell a strong smell – got into it with my little sister, and took deep breaths. Worked well.*

Hold Your Horses: interview questions

3. What, if anything, did you not like about HYH? [PROBE: What activities in group didn't you like? What is one thing that you liked least about HYH?] *Not yet.*
4. How has being part of HYH impacted your life outside of group? *I get happy when I get to come here – I like working with animals, and it's easy to be here and to talk. I know that no one's going to judge me or what I say.*

Program information

- What type of things did you talk about during your time in HYH? Did you learn new things? If yes, what type of new things did you learn (PROBE: For instance, did you learn more about self-compassion, healthy boundaries, tolerance, coping? Did you learn about safety)? *No.*
- Was there a difficult part of the program for you? PROBE: Were any of the topics or discussions uncomfortable for you? *No*
- **After participating in HYH, do you feel safer (PROBE: in your home, school, job, in general)?** *No – not unsafe before*
- In terms of coping with issues in your life, did HYH help you recognize strengths about yourself? *Not that know of*
 - If Yes: Will you describe these strengths that HYH helped you recognize?
- Did HYH help you learn ways to cooperate and work together for a common goal?
 - If Yes: Will you describe these ways of cooperating and working together?
- What in particular did you like about working with the horses? *I like grooming them and riding them – it's relaxing to groom*
- How did being out in nature and at the farm impact you verses being in an office setting? *That's also more relaxing – really quiet.*
- How was this therapy different from other therapy or programs you have participated in the past?

Culture

- Did you discuss things about differences in people's identity (i.e., age, race, sexual orientation, religion, culture)? If yes, what type of things did you discuss? *No*
- Did you feel like you are respected and understood by staff, especially when it comes to your identity (cultural background)? Did you feel like could be yourself (with staff, with the other girls in your group)? *Yeah.*
- Could HYH do anything different or additional when it comes to addressing your identity and culture? What would you do? *No they're doing a good job.*

Crisis response

- Did HYH help you [or your family] deal with any crises while you were in HYH? For example, did they help you find a place to live or make sure you had enough food to eat?

Hold Your Horses: interview questions

Some final thoughts

- If there was one way that HYH could have been more helpful to you before leaving HYH what would that have been?
- Do you feel like being part of HYH made it easier for you to stay on the right track? How did HYH staff help you succeed in meeting your goals?
- What are your thoughts about HYH ending? What are your concerns, if any? What are you the most excited about?
- What do you hope for yourself as you finish HYH? What are some of your goals for the future?
- Is there anything else you would like to share that would help us understand what your experience with HYH was like?

I'm kinda sad re: graduating – about to get license, re: excited. [else?] no.

Closing

Those are all of the topics I wanted to discuss today. Thank you for your time and for sharing your honest opinions with me. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me before you go, or you can email me.

[Distribute post-assessment, pen, and an envelope for them to seal finished survey in. Ask if they would like to do it themselves or if they would like you to go over the questions and have them mark their responses themselves. Have them seal post-assessment in the envelope provided.]

*[Bring them to the interview lead and she will give them their incentive **and tell them that if they have any problems with the gift card, they need to contact HYH staff.**]*

YMCA's Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T. SURVEY

Thank you for participating in the YMCA's Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T. group. In order to understand how and if things have changed for you since you began the program, please complete this survey which was made for a study that Wilder Research is doing for Hennepin County and the YMCA.

We would like you to answer the following questions, telling us your feelings about the YMCA's Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T. group. There are no right or wrong answers and your individual responses will not be shared with anyone, including staff at the YMCA. The results from this study will help YMCA's Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T. better understand and improve the group in the future.

For each response, check the box that best applies.

1. Did you complete YMCA's Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T.? ¹ Yes ² No

2. Please tell us your feelings about the following:
(remember, there are no right or wrong answers)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. The group was held in a safe space.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
b. I felt safe sharing my stories with the other girls in my group.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
c. The facilitators did not judge me.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
d. In general, I feel safe where I currently live.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
e. I have good qualities.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
f. I forgive myself when I make a mistake.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
g. I care about the people around me.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
h. I sometimes think about running away from home.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
i. I have friends I can count on when things go wrong.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
j. I have at least one adult I can trust in my life right now.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
k. I use words to express my feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
l. I feel hopeful about my future.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴

3. What about the program made you feel strong?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. Hearing people's stories in group.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
b. Learning about how people can be targeted by others who may want to do them harm.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴
c. Hearing stories about the strength of survivors of abuse.	<input type="checkbox"/> ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> ²	<input type="checkbox"/> ³	<input type="checkbox"/> ⁴

4. Think about Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T, and check the box that best applies.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. I could choose to not participate in group when/if that felt like the safest option.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
b. I felt safe sharing my thoughts in my journal with my counselors.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
c. The examples that were used during group were true of my culture.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
d. I could relate to the examples about culture that were given in group.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
e. I was comfortable to share in group.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
f. I felt safe sharing with my counselors when I met with them individually.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

5. Since being in this program, how do you feel the following has changed?	Improved a lot	Improved a little	Stayed the Same	Gotten worse
a. My feelings of sadness or being depressed.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
b. My feelings about myself have....	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
c. My ability to talk about my feelings has...	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
d. I have learned better ways to cope with problems...	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
e. My ability to control the desire to do self-harm...	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
f. My relationships with other people have...	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
h. I know who to turn to when I need to talk to someone...	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

6. What was the most important lesson you learned in this program?

7. If you could change one thing about the program, what would it be?

8. Anything else you would like to share?

**Thanks for taking the time to complete the survey.
Please put this survey in the envelop provided, seal it closed, and return to the interviewer.**

VOICE Focus Group

POWER: VOICE interview

Introduction – Lindsay, and Sana on the call, too.

- Purpose of project
- Here – talk about VOICE
- Confidential
 - o EXCEPT – self- or other-harm of you or another
- Voluntary
- No right or wrong answer
- \$20 Target card
- Any questions for me before we start?
- Permission to record?

Background

1. **As I mentioned before, you were invited to this group because of your involvement in the VOICE group. How long have you been with VOICE and what do you do with them?**
2. **If you were describing VOICE to someone who'd never heard of it before, what would you tell them?**
3. **How did you get started in VOICE?**

Work in VOICE

4. **What do you like about VOICE?**
5. **What impact, if any, do you think VOICE has on the POWER program?**
PROBE: Has anything changed in POWER because of VOICE? What?
PROBE: Was the change what you'd hoped for? Why or why not? Any way the change could have been any better?

Want others to know

6. **Part of this is going back to people at Hennepin County who make decisions about programs to give money to, and what sorts of program participants get referred to programs. Is there anything that you want those people to know about VOICE or POWER?**
7. **Is there anything you want county people to know about how it feels to get referred into girls' programs like POWER or VOICE?**
8. **Is there anything you want county people to know about how to best work with girls on probation?**
9. **Are there any areas for improvement for VOICE?**
PROBE: Wave a magic wand – what are 1 or 2 things you'd change to make VOICE better?
10. **And is there anything else you want to say about VOICE, what's good about it, how it could be better, or what people can do to best help girls on probation?**

County Staff Interviews

HCCMHC Project - Interview Questions for Probation Officers and HHS staff 2017

Intro: include information about the research question this year's evaluation will focus on measuring gender-specific outcomes of their county-involved youth (around safety, coping, well-being, and relationships).

Referrals

1. How are girls on probation referred to the gender-specific programs (Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold Your Horses (note, some may be referring to one on one others to group, POWER)?
 - a. How do you decide which program girls should go to? How do you decide if they should be referred to other programs (MST, etc.)?
2. What are examples of reasons you would not refer girls to gender-specific programs (Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold Your Horses, POWER)? Note: they may just say transportation, but probe for what else? Is it cohort structure (needing to have their girls enrolled sooner than the next opening)?
 - a. [PROBES: Are there any administrative/system-related reasons you might not refer girls? (ie, cohorts?) Or are there any particular types of girls that you think are less of a good fit for the program?]

Gender-specific programs (Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold Your Horses, POWER)

3. What do you see as the strengths, or most positive features, of these programs?
4. What are some areas of improvement for the programs? Why?
5. Are there any needs that are not being addressed by gender-specific programs (Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold Your Horses, POWER)? Gaps in services? Do the girls on your caseload have needs that gender-specific programs (Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold Your Horses, POWER) could address differently, in your opinion?

Communication

6. How often are you in contact with each programs' staff? Tell me about your interactions
 - a. PROBE: What is working well? How do you work through differences if there are any? Do you have scheduled meetings with each program?

Outcomes

7. How do you define success for the girls on your caseload? In general, what do you think is the difference between girls who succeed and don't? What is critical to their success?
8. In your opinion, do these gender specific programs help their participants become more resilient? Do they gain coping skills? Build healthier relationships?
9. Provide an example of the most successful referral you have made to gender-specific programs (Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold Your Horses, POWER). What made it so successful? If you have one that did not work as well – what went wrong?
10. If gender-specific programs (Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold Your Horses, POWER) was no longer a referral source for probation officers, how do you think it would affect girls on your caseload and in Hennepin County overall?
11. Do you think girls who go through gender-specific programs (Girls Circle H.E.A.R.T., Hold Your Horses, POWER) successfully will be less likely to recidivate or be placed out of home in the future (NOTE: DOCCR and HSPHD may have more restrictive settings for OHP)? Why?

Conclusion

12. Is there anything else we should know about the impacts you see from gender-specific programs?

Program Staff Interviews

HCCMHC 2017 Evaluation: Grantee focus group discussion/interview guide

Staff from Hennepin County have been working with Wilder Research over the past 3 years to collect and analyze program data from some of the community-based programs they fund that provide services to system-involved youth. The programs that are a part of this study include Girl's Circle H.E.A.R.T, Hold Your Horses, Power, and Runaway Intervention Program. With Local Collaborative Time Study (LCTS) funding, this year's evaluation has focused on what can DOCCR can do to better capture the relevant outcomes of their gender-specific programs (around safety, coping, well-being, and relationships).

Focus group rules – one at a time, confidential, mutual respect

Program introduction:

1. To begin, we'd like you each to spend just 1-2 minutes to briefly talk about your program. Let us know your target audience, the major project activities, and the goals of those activities.

Program delivery:

2. How would you describe the relationships the youth participants have with program staff? [PROBE: How easy or difficult is it for the youth to talk to staff? Do they feel comfortable talking to staff about your problems?]
3. How would you describe the relationships girls have with other girls in your program? [Probe: How easy or difficult is it for participants to talk to others? Does the girls feel welcome there? Does participants consider other participants their personal friends? How has this changed over time?]
4. Has the girls experienced any barriers in accessing services/activities in your program? [Probe: If so, what are the barriers? How have they impacted participants? Have those barriers been resolved? If so, how? Did staff help to address these barriers? Were participants satisfied with how they were resolved? [CHALLENGES OF CLIENTS: biggest concerns they have]]
5. Are the girls receiving services at other organizations or with other programs aside from yours? [Probe: If so, can you describe those services, programs, and/or organizations? Do these girls find these other services/organizations helpful? If so, how?]

Program outcomes:

6. How has your program impacted youths' lives away from the program [Probe: With family? With job? With anything else? Can you tell me more?]
7. Since coming to the programs, have you noticed any other changes in girls' lives or attitude towards life? [Probe: What has changed? What has not changed? Why or why not? Do you think the programs contributed to these changes?]
8. Have you noticed any changes within the youths' family because of their participation at the program? [Probe: If so – what changes? What do you think led to these changes? Did the program contribute to these changes?]
9. What do you feel are the most helpful activities that the youths take part in? What are the least helpful activities?
10. What is your program doing to recognize girls who graduate? How has these activities bring closure to the program?
11. What things are going well when thinking about the gender-based DOCCR-supported programs? What could be improved with the system of gender based DOCCR programs? [Probe: What could be done to improve the system? Are there any current activities/processes that could be improved? Are there any activities/processes that the system does not do that could be included? Anything else?]

Conclusion:

12. A word or two to describe the girls/young women you serve?
13. Anything else we should know?